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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0118
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0165
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0127
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0124
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0127
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0155
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 000206

SIPDIS SIPDIS
DEPT FOR SCA AND DRL
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-02-23

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SUBJECT: SUSPECTED AMCIT MISSIONARIES TOLD TO LEAVE UZBEKISTAN

REF: a) IIR 6 939 0018 09

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CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Fitzmaurice, Poloff; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: Authorities have told three AmCits associated with the New Hope faith-based humanitarian assistance NGO, which provides medical assistance to disabled persons in Tashkent, that they must depart Uzbekistan by February 25. Emboffs met with the AmCits, who plan to depart Uzbekistan by the deadline. Most likely, the AmCits are being deported because authorities believed they were missionaries, whether or not they actually were engaged in missionary activity. Uzbek authorities also have deported several other suspected AmCit missionaries over the past year (reftel). While regrettable, such deportations are unsurprising, as proselytism remains illegal under Uzbek law. End summary.

EMBOFFS' MEETINGS WITH AMCITS

12. (C) In two separate meetings over the past week, Emboffs met with the three AmCits, who have been long associated with the New Hope faith-based humanitarian assistance NGO, which for many years has provided free medical assistance to Uzbeks in need, including disabled persons who have received free prostheses from the organization. The three AmCits taught English at New Hope's office, and two of them (a husband and wife) also served as administrators at the NGO. The AmCits' problems with Uzbek authorities began in November 2008, after several officials from the Ministry of Justice visited New Hope during the English classes and questioned the three AmCits. After reviewing their accreditation cards, the officials noted that the AmCits were accredited to work at New Hope as administrators, not as English teachers. They warned them to stop teaching English and also requested written statements from some of their students.

13. (C) After the visit, the AmCits continued their English courses and heard nothing more from Uzbek authorities until February 11, when they were called to the Ministry of Justice and told that they must leave Uzbekistan by February 25. While the officials recognized New Hope's humanitarian work in Uzbekistan, they also accused the AmCits of breaking unspecified Uzbek laws. The AmCits do not expect the Ministry's decision to be overturned and were resigned to leave Uzbekistan by February 25, though they requested that the Embassy seek clarification from the government on why they were being deported.

14. (C) All of the AmCits' visas were set to expire in May. The husband and wife worked at New Hope in Uzbekistan for approximately half the year for the last seven years. While back in the United States, they also helped collect and ship humanitarian assistance to Uzbekistan (the U.S. State Department also pays for the transportation of some of the humanitarian assistance that New Hope receives). The other AmCit had worked in Uzbekistan for 13 years and had previously operated a free medical clinic in Almaliq and a separate English center in Tashkent, both of which were previously shut down (see para 7).

AMCITS DENY MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

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15. (C) The AmCits explained that while they were practicing Christians, they had never engaged openly in proselytism at New Hope. Nevertheless, they noted that authorities likely suspected them of being missionaries, which they acknowledged could be the reason for their deportation.

NEW HOPE NGO STILL OPEN

¶6. (C) Despite the deportation of the three AmCits, New Hope's office in Tashkent remains open. The other AmCits and South Korean expatriates at New Hope, including the AmCit head of the organization, a doctor who is well-known for his impressive ability to craft prostheses for disabled persons, have not been asked to leave Uzbekistan and will continue their work. However, the AmCit head of the organization explained to Emboffs that New Hope funded part of its medical assistance program by charging students attending its English lessons. With the loss of this revenue, New Hope will have to lay off some of its local staff and cut back its medical assistance programs.

AMCIT HAD LONG-STANDING PROBLEMS WITH UZBEK AUTHORITIES

¶7. (C) The AmCit who had spent the longest time in Uzbekistan has encountered problems with various Uzbek officials over the years. He had only started teaching English at New Hope during the past year, and the other AmCits speculated that he might have brought some of his problems to their organization. For example, the AmCit used to operate a free medical clinic in the town of Almaliq in Tashkent province, which was forced to close four years ago after it was raided by a group of local officials he believed were intent on seizing the clinic for their own profit. During the raid, authorities found expired medications in the clinic, which the Ministry of Health later cited as justification for the clinic's closure. To this day, the clinic remains closed and has not been taken over by local authorities.

¶8. (C) After the clinic was seized, the AmCit moved to Tashkent where he continued to informally provide medical assistance to those in need and also opened his own English center. Approximately 18 months ago, he attempted to register the English center, but was unable to do so after the hokim (local administration head) of Tashkent's Mirobad district refused to sign the registration form. The AmCit called the hokim "notoriously corrupt" and speculated that he refused to register the center without a bribe. Afterwards, the AmCit began teaching English at New Hope.

¶9. (C) In addition, the AmCit explained that a few months ago, he failed to admit a young medical student to his English class, who later turned out to be a son of high-ranking official in the

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Ministry of Justice. The AmCit reportedly heard that the official was upset, which he believed might also have contributed to their decision to shut down New Hope's English program.

¶10. (C) Furthermore, the AmCit noted that his residence was under (what he thought to be) National Security Service surveillance roughly six months ago. He noted that at the time, there was a car parked in front of his residence 24 hours a day with several individuals and what appeared to be sophisticated surveillance equipment inside. He believed that Uzbek authorities were attempting to gather evidence that he was engaged in missionary activity.

PAS FSN CONDUCTED PRESENTATION AT NEW HOPE

¶11. (C) On January 30, the Embassy's Educational Advisor FSN gave a presentation on studying at American universities at New Hope after being invited by one of the AmCits. The AmCit later speculated that authorities might have decided to deport them in retaliation for hosting the presentation (Comment: We think this explanation is highly unlikely. The FSN has given the same presentation at several other private English centers in Tashkent, none of which have experienced any difficulties afterwards. The AmCits' difficulties with Uzbek authorities also preceded the FSN's presentation at New Hope. End comment.)

OTHER RECENT DEPORTATION OF SUSPECTED AMCIT MISSIONARIES

¶12. (C) The three AmCits are only the latest of several suspected AmCit missionaries who have been deported from Uzbekistan over the past year. In November 2008, an AmCit missionary and member of the International Church in Tashkent was forced to leave Uzbekistan along with his family (reftel). At the time, he explained that they were the eighth AmCit family from the International Church deported or otherwise forced to leave Uzbekistan in 2008.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Most likely, authorities have asked the three AmCits to leave Uzbekistan because they suspected them of being missionaries, whether or not they actually were engaged in proselytism, just as they have deported several other suspected AmCit missionaries over the past year. Uzbek authorities might have been especially concerned with the English lessons offered at New Hope, which put

the AmCits in direct contact with a significant number of Uzbek students (the AmCits were teaching English to approximately 150 Uzbek students at any given time). The fact that the AmCits continued to teach English at New Hope despite the unofficial warning from the Justice Ministry officials also might have led to

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their deportations. Another possibility is that the AmCits were somehow breaking Uzbek law by charging for their English classes and not reporting the income to Uzbek authorities. In the end, such deportations are unsurprising, as proselytism remains illegal under Uzbek law, but are they still lamentable. The AmCits, in addition to teaching English, were helping to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to some of the most vulnerable members of Uzbek society (assistance which the Uzbek government itself fails to adequately provide). Nevertheless, we believe that Uzbek authorities recognize the assistance New Hope provides to disabled persons in Uzbekistan and have no plans to close the organization as a whole. As requested by the AmCits, we have submitted a diplomatic note to the government requesting formal clarification on why they are being deported.

NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:00351cd2-f1b9-4a2a-85